

Ugaritic

Ugaritic^[2] (/ˌuːɡəˈrɪtɪk, ˌjuː-/) is an extinct dialect of the Amorite language (and the only known Amorite dialect preserved in writing) known through the Ugaritic texts discovered by French archaeologists in 1929.^{[3][4][5][6][7]} It is known almost only in the Ugarit texts found in the ruined city of Ugarit (modern Ras Shamra, Syria).^{[8][9]} It has been used by scholars of the Hebrew Bible to clarify Biblical Hebrew texts and has revealed ways in which the cultures of ancient Israel and Judah found parallels in the neighboring cultures.^[9]

Ugaritic has been called "the greatest literary discovery from antiquity since the deciphering of the Egyptian hieroglyphs and Mesopotamian cuneiform".^[10]

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	Ugaritic
Native to	Ugarit
Extinct	12th century BC
Language family	Afro-Asiatic <ul style="list-style-type: none">Semitic<ul style="list-style-type: none">West Semitic<ul style="list-style-type: none">Central Semitic<ul style="list-style-type: none">Northwest Semitic<ul style="list-style-type: none">Amoritc<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ugaritic
Writing system	Ugaritic alphabet
Language codes	
ISO 639-2	uga (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?code_ID=470)
ISO 639-3	uga
Glottolog	ugar1238 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/ugar1238) ^[1]

Corpus

The Ugaritic language is attested in texts from the 14th through the 12th century BC. The city of Ugarit was destroyed roughly 1190 BC.^[11]

Literary texts discovered at Ugarit include the *Legend of Keret*, the legends of Danel, the *Myth of Baal-Aliyan*, and the *Death of Baal*—the latter two are also collectively known as the *Baal Cycle*—all revealing aspects of ancient Northwest Semitic religion.

It has been proposed that Ugaritic texts might help solve such biblical puzzles as the anachronism of *Ezekiel* mentioning Daniel at Ezekiel 14:13-16 (https://bible.oremus.org/?passage=Ezekiel+14:13–14:16&version=nrsv).^[9]

Writing system

The Ugaritic alphabet is a cuneiform script used beginning in the 15th century BC. Like most Semitic scripts, it is an abjad, where each symbol stands for a consonant, leaving the reader to supply the appropriate vowel.

Although it appears similar to Mesopotamian cuneiform (whose writing techniques it borrowed), its symbols and symbol meanings are unrelated. It is the oldest example of the family of West Semitic scripts such as the Phoenician, Paleo-Hebrew, and Aramaic alphabets (including the Hebrew alphabet). The so-called "long alphabet" has 30 letters while the "short alphabet" has 22. Other languages (particularly Hurrian) were occasionally written in it in the Ugarit area, although not elsewhere.



Clay tablet of Ugaritic alphabet

Clay tablets written in Ugaritic provide the earliest evidence of both the Levantine ordering of the alphabet, which gave rise to the alphabetic order of the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin alphabets; and the South Semitic order, which gave rise to the order of the Ge'ez script. The script was written from left to right.

Phonology

Ugaritic had 28 consonantal phonemes (including two semivowels) and eight vowel phonemes (three short vowels and five long vowels): *a ā i ī u ū ē ō*. The phonemes *ē* and *ō* occur only as long vowels and are the result of monophthongization of the diphthongs *ey* and *aw*, respectively.

ʔa	b	g	ḥ (x)	d	h
w	z	ḥ (h)	ṭ	y	k
š	l	m	ḏ (ð)	n	z (θ)
s	ṣ	p	ṣ	q	r
ṭ (θ)	ḡ (γ)	t	ṭi	ṭu	s ₂

Table of Ugaritic alphabet

Ugaritic consonantal phonemes

		<u>Labial</u>	<u>Interdental</u>	<u>Dental/Alveolar</u>		<u>Palatal</u>	<u>Velar</u>	<u>Uvular</u>	<u>Pharyngeal</u>	<u>Glottal</u>
				<u>plain</u>	<u>emphatic</u>					
<u>Nasal</u>		<u>m</u>		<u>n</u>						
<u>Stop</u>	<u>voiceless</u>	<u>p</u>		<u>t</u>	<u>tˤ</u>		<u>k</u>	<u>q</u>		<u>ʔ</u>
	<u>voiced</u>	<u>b</u>		<u>d</u>			<u>g</u>			
<u>Fricative</u>	<u>voiceless</u>		<u>θ</u>	<u>s</u>	<u>sˤ</u>	<u>ʃ</u>	<u>x</u>		<u>ħ</u>	<u>h</u>
	<u>voiced</u>		<u>ð</u>	<u>z</u>	<u>ðˤ</u>	<u>(z)^[1]</u>	<u>ɣ^[2]</u>		<u>ʕ</u>	
<u>Approximant</u>				<u>l</u>		<u>j</u>	<u>w</u>			
<u>Trill</u>				<u>r</u>						

1. The voiced palatal fricative [ʒ] occurs as a late variant of the voiced interdental fricative /ð/.
2. The voiced velar fricative /ɣ/, while an independent phoneme at all periods, also occurs as a late variant of the emphatic voiced interdental /ðˤ/.

The following table shows Proto-Semitic phonemes and their correspondences among Ugaritic, Classical Arabic and Tiberian Hebrew:

Proto-Semitic	Ugaritic		Classical Arabic		Tiberian Hebrew		Imperial Aramaic	
<i>b</i> [b]	𐎁	<i>b</i>	ب	<i>b</i> [b]	ב	<i>b/b̄</i> [b/v]	ב	<i>b/b̄</i> [b/v]
<i>p</i> [p]	𐎂	<i>p</i>	פ	<i>f</i> [f]	פ	<i>p/p̄</i> [p/f]	פ	<i>p/p̄</i> [p/f]
<i>ḏ</i> [ð]	𐎃	<i>d</i> ; sometimes <i>ḏ</i> [ð]	ذ	<i>ḏ</i> [ð]	ד	<i>z</i> [z]	ד (older ד)	<i>d/ḏ</i> [d/ð]
<i>ṭ</i> [θ]	𐎄	<i>ṭ</i> [θ]	ث	<i>ṭ</i> [θ]	ט	<i>ś</i> [ʃ]	ת	<i>t/ṭ</i> [t/θ]
<i>ṭ</i> [θʻ]	𐎅	<i>ṣ</i> [ðʻ]; sporadically <i>ḡ</i> [ɣ]	ظ	<i>ṣ</i> [ðʻ]	צ	<i>ś</i> [sʻ]	ט	<i>ṭ</i> [tʻ]
<i>d</i> [d]	𐎆	<i>d</i>	ד	<i>d</i> [d]	ד	<i>d/ḏ</i> [d/ð]	ד	<i>d/ḏ</i> [d/ð]
<i>t</i> [t]	𐎇	<i>t</i>	ת	<i>t</i> [t]	ת	<i>t/ṭ</i> [t/θ]	ת	<i>t/ṭ</i> [t/θ]
<i>ṭ</i> [tʻ]	𐎈	<i>ṭ</i> [tʻ]	ט	<i>ṭ</i> [tʻ]	ט	<i>ṭ</i> [tʻ]	ט	<i>ṭ</i> [tʻ]
<i>ś</i> [s]	𐎉	<i>ś</i> [ʃ]	ס	<i>s</i> [s]	ש	<i>ś</i> [ʃ]	ש	<i>ś</i> [ʃ]
<i>z</i> [dz]	𐎊	<i>z</i>	ז	<i>z</i> [z]	ז	<i>z</i> [z]	ז	<i>z</i> [z]
<i>s</i> [ts]	𐎋	<i>s</i>	ס	<i>s</i> [s]	ס	<i>s</i> [s]	ס	<i>s</i> [s]
<i>ś</i> [tsʻ]	𐎌	<i>ś</i> [sʻ]	ص	<i>ś</i> [sʻ]	צ	<i>ś</i> [sʻ]	צ	<i>ś</i> [sʻ]
<i>l</i> [l]	𐎍	<i>l</i>	ל	<i>l</i> [l]	ל	<i>l</i> [l]	ל	<i>l</i> [l]
<i>ś</i> [ʕ]	𐎎	<i>ś</i>	ش	<i>ś</i> [ʃ]	ש	<i>ś</i> [ʕ] → [s]	ס/ש	<i>s/ś</i> [s]
<i>ś</i> [(t)ʕʻ]	𐎏	<i>ś</i> [sʻ]	ض	<i>ḏ</i> [ʕʻ] → [dʻ]	צ	<i>ś</i> [sʻ]	ד (older ד)	<i>ʻ</i> [ʕʻ]
<i>g</i> [g]	𐎐	<i>g</i>	ج	<i>ǧ</i> [gʲ] → [dʒ]	ג	<i>g/ḡ</i> [g/ɣ]	ג	<i>g/ḡ</i> [g/ɣ]
<i>k</i> [k]	𐎑	<i>k</i>	ك	<i>k</i> [k]	כ	<i>k/k̄</i> [k/x]	כ	<i>k/k̄</i> [k/x]
<i>q</i> [kʻ]	𐎒	<i>q</i>	ق	<i>q</i> [q]	ק	<i>q</i> [q]	ק	<i>q</i> [q]
<i>ḡ</i> [ɣ]	𐎓	<i>ḡ</i> [ɣ]	غ	<i>ḡ</i> [ɣ]	ע	<i>ʻ</i> [ʕʻ]	ע	<i>ʻ</i> [ʕʻ]
<i>ḥ</i> [x]	𐎔	<i>ḥ</i> [x]	خ	<i>ḥ</i> [x]	ח	<i>ḥ</i> [ħ]	ח	<i>ḥ</i> [ħ]
<i>ʻ</i> [ʕʻ]	𐎕	<i>ʻ</i> [ʕʻ]	ع	<i>ʻ</i> [ʕʻ]	ע	<i>ʻ</i> [ʕʻ]	ע	<i>ʻ</i> [ʕʻ]
<i>ḥ</i> [ħ]	𐎖	<i>ḥ</i> [ħ]	ح	<i>ḥ</i> [ħ]	ח	<i>ḥ</i> [ħ]	ח	<i>ḥ</i> [ħ]

ʾ [ʔ]	𐤀	ʾ [ʔ]	ء	ʾ [ʔ]	א	ʾ [ʔ]	א/Ø	ʾ/Ø [ʔ/Ø]
h [h]	𐤁	h	ה	h [h]	ה	h [h]	ה	h [h]
m [m]	𐤂	m	מ	m [m]	מ	m [m]	מ	m [m]
n [n]	𐤃	n	נ	n [n]	נ	n [n]; total assimilation before a consonant	נ	n [n]
r [r]	𐤄	r	ר	r [r]	ר	r [r]	ר	r [r]
w [w]	𐤅	w	ו	w [w]	ו	w [w]; y [j] initially	ו	w [w]
y [j]	𐤆	y [j]	י	y [j]	י	y [j]	י	y [j]
Proto-Semitic	Ugaritic	Classical Arabic	Tiberian Hebrew	Imperial Aramaic				

Grammar

Ugaritic is an inflected language, and its grammatical features are highly similar to those found in Classical Arabic and Akkadian. It possesses two genders (masculine and feminine), three grammatical cases for nouns and adjectives (nominative, accusative, and genitive), three numbers (singular, dual, and plural), and verb aspects similar to those found in other Northwest Semitic languages. The word order for Ugaritic is verb–subject–object (VSO) and subject–object–verb (SOV),^[12] possessed–possessor (NG), and noun–adjective (NA). Ugaritic is considered a conservative Semitic language, since it retains most of the phonemes, the case system, and the word order of the ancestral Proto-Semitic language.^[13]

See also

- Northwest Semitic languages
- Central Semitic languages
- Semitic languages
- Proto-Semitic language

Notes

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External links

- Ugarit and the Bible (<http://www.theology.edu/ugarbib.htm>). An excerpt from an online introductory course on Ugaritic grammar (the Quartz Hill School of Theology's course noted in the links hereafter). Includes a cursory discussion on the relationship between Ugaritic and Old Testament/Hebrew Bible literature.
 - "El in the Ugaritic tablets" (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A1113436>) on the BBCi website gives many attributes of the Ugaritic creator and his consort Athirat.
 - Abstract of Mark Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Text* (https://web.archive.org/web/20031202023745/http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/MSmith_BiblicalMonotheism.htm).
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